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PRACTICE TEACHING IN THE STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

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Most people believe that practice in teaching under competent supervision is the most important single factor in the training of teachers. For this reason, great importance is attached to the desirability of securing adequate practice facilities in state normal schools. In recent years much thought has been given to this problem and the result has been great improvement in the character and amount of practice teaching. Many state normal schools have found it necessary to formulate new and better plans for conducting this phase of their work.

This article is a discussion of certain aspects of the work which center around the training school at the State Normal School at Oshkosh.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

There are two fundamental principles upon which the plan of practice teaching rests. It seems desirable that a statement of these should be made at this point. They are stated here in somewhat arbitrary form as a tentative formulation of the basic principles on which the plan is carried out.

1. *Practice teaching should begin early in the course with individuals and small groups, and throughout the course should alternate with observation of teaching which is correct in principle and excellently executed.* It is coming to be a recognized principle that a basis of concrete experience near the beginning is very desirable in learning a profession. Most people now agree that it is a principle of economical learning in the mastery of any art to acquire some facility in practicing the rudiments of it purely as an art before studying the science upon which it is based. Students should therefore acquire some facility in teaching very early in their course. This teaching should begin in the first year with one or two pupils, after some weeks of observation of the teaching of the critic teachers. The number of pupils in the groups taught

by the normal-school students should gradually increase during the year to three or four or a half dozen. A half hour or an hour a day may be devoted to this kind of work and it proves of the utmost value in enabling the students in their second year to understand and to profit from their instruction. There should also be regular class periods devoted to discussion of what is observed in the training school. These should follow every observation period and should result in definite growth on the part of the students in the understanding of educational principles.

2. *There should be a liberal supply of critic teachers and supervisors.* The most important factor in the training of teachers is practice teaching under conditions which are in all respects typical of ordinary public schools, with very close supervision by critic teachers and supervisors. Experience seems to indicate that one critic teacher or supervisor can supervise only eight student teachers at one time if she is to do efficient work.

PEDAGOGICAL WORK IN THE FIRST YEAR

In the first year of the curriculum there are four courses which deal with actual teaching and school management: (1) Apprentice Work; (2) Observation of Teaching; (3) Apprentice Teaching; (4) Elementary Education.

APPRENTICE WORK

It has previously been pointed out that it is very desirable that students should begin actual participation in the real activities of the schoolroom as soon as they begin their course in the normal school. Therefore, they are assigned to apprentice work as soon as they enter school. This involves no teaching, but requires certain duties in the schoolroom for regular periods every week. This work includes such activities and duties as the following: becoming familiar with the plan book and its use; collecting and classifying pictures and stories for supplementary reading; getting familiar with the register; learning to keep the records; making perception cards; collecting and grading papers; caring for drinking fountains; participating in plays and games; assisting children with their wraps; attending to the window shades; preparing the proper supplies of paper and crayon; collecting material for teachers, such as pictures, clippings, and similar articles; acting as room librarians; keeping closets in order; and many other similar duties.

The purpose of this apprentice work is to enable the students to become familiar in certain definite ways with the work of the school-room. They have opportunity, incidentally, to observe methods of teaching and to learn the routine of the schoolroom in many particulars. Their contact with children serves to make more meaningful the work which they are studying at the same time in child psychology. It is found that students who have this work get a much more intelligent idea of their psychology, and comprehend in a very much better way what actual teaching situations mean.

OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

In the second semester of the first year, four hours a week are devoted to two courses called observation of teaching and elementary education. These courses, while they are listed separately, consist of one course amounting in terms of time to four periods a week. The proportion of time devoted to each, as indicated in the curriculum described in the first article in this series, is only approximate.

In this work, the students begin to get their first introduction to the theory and practice of teaching. The work in elementary education is based entirely upon the work in observation, which continues throughout the second and third semesters, during which the students get a systematic series of observations in all the subjects which form a part of the school curriculum of the years for which the particular normal-school curriculum prepares. In reading, for example, the students see at the outset a lesson which represents the initial step in first-grade reading. This may be repeated several times with different groups of children, until the students have been able to note very definitely how it is conducted. The next lesson in reading may illustrate a type of work given at the end of ten days, and this may be repeated several times. The third lesson may be one which would be taught in the third week of school. This process continues until the students have had an opportunity to observe typical steps in the development of the teaching of reading throughout the several grades for which they are being prepared. The same practice is carried out in connection with all other subjects.

Parallel to the work in observation goes elementary education. This consists of class periods devoted to the discussions of prin-

ciples and methods of teaching, and is based upon the work in observation. It is practically all personal instruction by the teacher of education with perhaps a little assigned reading. The plan is that in this first introduction to the theory and practice of teaching, the students shall learn by frequent and continued observation of correct and skilful teaching, by means of class work devoted to a discussion of what is seen, together with a great deal of personal instruction by an instructor who knows from actual experience how to teach correctly and skilfully.

GENERAL NATURE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The term elementary education as used here includes everything which comes under the head of the theory and practice of teaching, both special methods and general pedagogy, so called. It is believed to be better to combine all of this in one course than to separate it into several courses. For example, when the principle of motivation is to be taught, it is learned in connection with something which needs to be motivated. When the theory of teaching pupils how to study needs to be considered, it is taken up in connection with the theory of teaching subjects in which it is to be applied. The same principle holds throughout all the work in education.

APPRENTICE TEACHING

A new feature comes into the work of students in the second semester of the first year in the form of the course in apprentice teaching which continues through two semesters. Students in this work do actual teaching with individuals and small groups. Apprentice teaching during the first few weeks takes the form of special help given to weaker children, such as word drill with flash cards; drill on number combinations; tone drill and rote songs in music; instruction in formation of letters in handwriting; special help in correcting errors in English; conducting rest periods; and similar work.

The apprentice teacher deals with individual pupils for the first few weeks. Each one thus gets some practice in teaching and handling children. After a short time, the students take small groups of children, usually with not more than three or four children in a group. All of this work is in addition to the regular class work

of the children and usually those children are included who need special help and instruction.

The apprentice work is carried on under the closest supervision by critic teachers and supervisors. This work runs parallel to that in observation and elementary education.

PEDAGOGICAL WORK IN THE SECOND YEAR

In the second year of the various curricula, in the first semester, elementary education appears for five periods a week, observation of teaching for two periods, and apprentice teaching for two periods.

In the elementary education is given a detailed and thorough consideration of the theory and practice of teaching in the grades with which the particular curriculum is concerned. The work in education continues to be based upon observation as in the previous year in about the same way and is paralleled by apprentice teaching as previously described. The work in education, however, differs somewhat from that of the previous year. Now it is not only based upon observation but it also includes a considerable amount of study of selected references. No particular textbook is used as the basis of the course, but assigned readings are given in many books, monographs, and magazines. The specific educational practice of the grades concerned is taught definitely and thoroughly, and this practice is thoroughly exemplified in the work in observation, which still continues to be carried out systematically as in the previous year.

No attempt is made in this course to teach any of the stock methods now on the market. On the other hand, students are given thorough instruction concerning such specific procedure in teaching as seems to be justified in the light of present-day scientific knowledge. Of course, students are not confined to one type of method, but an attempt is made to so ground them in the principles of teaching and to make them resourceful to such an extent that they are able to formulate for themselves desirable ways of teaching which will conform to correct educational principles and be in harmony with the results of modern investigations in education. In a word, the purpose is to give them, through instruction and practice, such knowledge of the fundamental principles underlying teaching that they can be self-directive in working out their own pedagogy.

PLAN FOR SUPERVISED TEACHING

The curriculum for the second year is outlined in the form of two semesters' work. The first semester consists largely of professional study, together with apprentice teaching; the second principally of supervised teaching with five periods per week of class work.

As the curriculum is laid out on paper, it appears as if students had their regular practice-teaching all in the second semester. A word of explanation, therefore, is necessary concerning this. The plan followed is that at the beginning of the second year the senior class is divided into two groups equal in number and of approximately equal ability. One of these groups, which is called the *practice group*, begins the work as laid out for the second semester of the senior year. The other, called the *study group*, begins the work of the first semester of this year. Thus one-half of the senior class does practice teaching and the other carries on study. At the end of nine weeks this is reversed and the practice group changes to study and the study group changes to practice. At the end of another nine weeks it changes again and also at the end of the third nine weeks. Thus, each group has alternate study and practice for nine-week periods throughout the year. The tabulation below shows how this works out for each group:

Group A.....	Study for nine weeks	Practice for nine weeks	Study for nine weeks	Practice for nine weeks
Group B.....	Practice for nine weeks	Study for nine weeks	Practice for nine weeks	Study for nine weeks

The standard for practice teaching is represented by a requirement of one-half day of teaching each day for eighteen weeks. In planning the practice teaching, each grade in the training school is divided into two divisions, and to each division is assigned two students for practice for the forenoon, and two others for the afternoon. Each of these divisions consists of about twenty pupils and is given a room by itself. All the conditions are in every particular as nearly like actual school conditions as possible. In fact, there is little difference between these grades and those of any other school. The two students assigned to a given half-grade have charge of the school throughout a half-day each day. One of the students is appointed head teacher of the room and looks after the discipline, attends to the register, and, in all par-

ticulars, conducts the school as she would her own school in actual teaching. She teaches about half the work and the other student acts as her assistant and teaches the other half. After a time, the assistant becomes the head teacher and the other student becomes the assistant. Thus each gets experience in actual teaching under real school conditions, and also has an opportunity to conduct the school as if she were teaching it alone, bearing all the responsibility for its successful conduct and management. These students are given experience in each of the three grades with which the curriculum which they are taking deals.

Students make profitable use of their free time. If their period for practice is in the forenoon, they have the entire afternoon for preparing themselves for the next day's work. They are usually found in the library during the half-day during which they are not teaching, working up material and otherwise preparing themselves for their next teaching. They also have abundant opportunities to consult normal-school teachers as to sources of material and similar matters. This is found to be very advantageous, for the reason that the students go to their classes very thoroughly prepared on the subject-matter which they are to teach. Experience seems to indicate that it is bad policy to require normal-school students to do practice teaching for short periods each day and carry a considerable load of studies at the same time for they do justice to neither. When they have their whole time free for practice teaching and such preparation as is necessary, they can be held rigidly responsible for successful teaching. It is found that they grow in ability to teach more rapidly under this plan.

The practice group, as the curriculum shows, has school organization and management for two periods a week and elementary education for three periods. Both of these studies are based entirely upon the practice. The school organization and management, as previously noted, is taught by the director of the training school, and centers entirely around the actual problems which arise in teaching. A detailed description of this course has been given elsewhere under another head.

The course in elementary education in the practice semester in each curriculum is taught by the director of that department who is also head supervisor of practice for that curriculum. Although the students in the two previous semesters in education have had

a complete survey of the methodology of the grades concerned, the work of this final semester, for a portion of the time, covers the same ground but with one difference. One part of the course is now based entirely upon the mistakes and the evident weaknesses of the practicing students. For example, the supervisor may observe in the practice work that the students are weak or are making mistakes in the execution of a given principle in teaching reading. Her task in her class in education immediately becomes that of giving further instruction pointed toward correcting that error. In other words, in the class work she gives the appropriate instruction, and in her supervision follows up the same matter with individuals until the mistake is corrected.

In this final semester the class also makes a special study of the elementary-school curriculum, as indicated in the preceding article in this series, in the description of the course in elementary education.

Whenever a student in this class gets to the point that his practice is correct in principle and his only need appears to be further practice to perfect himself, he is excused from further work in methods and the instructor then deals with him, as far as methods are concerned, only in supervision for the purpose of which there are, of course, many individual and group conferences. This proves to be an advantage, for the reason that it enables the teacher to concentrate her attention, toward the end of the year, on those students who are weakest in the technique of teaching, and who obviously need the instruction most. Whenever it is found, however, that a student in practice is violating fundamental principles of teaching which he has previously been taught, he is required to resume the study of methods and continue until his practice improves. Thus the students continually strive to do such excellent work that they may be excused from this work, which is made something of an honor. When they have once been excused, they work hard to maintain their standard of teaching in order to continue in their exemption.

About half of the semester is devoted to the study of the curriculum and from this no one is excused.

The student who does not succeed before the end of the year in reaching a certain definite standard of teaching is not allowed to graduate. In other words, the final test which determines

whether a student is to receive the diploma of the school or not is his ability to teach competently and to manage a school successfully. Students who do not attain this standard by the end of the year, although they may have passed all the other requirements, are asked to return for further practice in the training department, the length of such additional work to be determined entirely by their success in teaching.

COURSE OF STUDY FOR TRAINING SCHOOL

One of the weaknesses which is often found in normal schools is that the educational policy and practice which is exemplified in the training school and that which is taught by the different instructors in the normal department are at variance in important particulars. In many instances this is true to such an extent as to lead to great confusion in the minds of the students. In order to overcome this difficulty a *Handbook of Practice* is being prepared by the members of the faculty, and is now in use in manuscript form. Both the training-school teachers and the normal-school instructors have contributed to this. The plan of the *Handbook of Practice* is that there shall be a series of chapters, each dealing with a special subject and with a discussion of the method of instruction in a somewhat thoroughgoing and yet brief way. Little attempt is made to discuss points which are subjects of controversy in education, but the aim is to give straightforward, simple directions for teaching. The educational practice which is outlined is intended to conform to accepted doctrines, and to be such as is justified in the light of approved and recognized principles of teaching, as they are known at the present time.

This *Handbook of Practice* is being perfected by committees of the faculty under the direction and supervision of the president. For example, the chapter on history is being studied by a committee composed of the head of the training school, the supervisors of practice, the critic teachers, and the instructors in history in the normal department. Each person who suggests ideas for the chapter is under the necessity of defending them before the group. This has proved to be very valuable work for all those concerned. It is planned that Volume I of this *Handbook of Practice* will consist of about two hundred pages, and will deal with the work of the first six grades. It serves as the course of study

for the training department, and is also the basis of instruction in methods in the normal department. It is found that such a document becomes a great force for co-ordinating the work of the normal and training departments.

TEACHING AND SUPERVISORY FORCE

Under the plan suggested in this article, a somewhat larger supervising force is necessary than under the former plan. It is the plan that students shall learn how to teach largely by practice in teaching under close, careful, and competent supervision by people who know how to teach well.

The supervisory force includes a director of training, who teaches school organization and management, and devotes her entire time to supervisory and administrative work in connection with the training school. In addition to the director of the training department, there is a head of each department who acts as supervisor of practice for three grades. These supervisors devote about half of their time to supervision of practice. In addition to these, there is a regular grade critic teacher for each grade who devotes a considerable portion of her time to supervision. A large proportion of the normal-school instructors teach regular classes in the training school.